

Malnutrition in Malawi Holding Our Country Back

FACT SHEET FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

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While Malawi has made strides in reducing child deaths in recent years, rates of malnutrition for children and mothers are still high, compromising their health and survival and undermining development efforts.

- Malnutrition in Malawi includes chronic malnutrition (stunting, or short-for-age), underweight (low weight-for-age), acute malnutrition (wasting, or low weight-for-height), anaemia, vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency, and low birth weight (< 2.5 kg).¹
- Stunting prevalence is alarmingly high, affecting almost half of children under 5.¹
- Anaemia prevalence is even worse, affecting 63% of children under 5 and 38% of pregnant women.¹

Impact on Health

- More than a quarter of all child deaths in Malawi are associated with undernutrition.^{2,3}
- Anaemia in young children increases the risk of infectious diseases. In pregnancy, anaemia is associated with 22% of maternal deaths and 24% of neonatal deaths⁴; and is a major cause of low birth weight.¹ Babies with low birth weight are four times more likely to die within the first month of life than other babies.²
- Malnourished children are more likely to develop and die from common childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea and pneumonia and are more likely to develop chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease in adulthood.^{2,3}

Impact on Education

- Children who are stunted learn to sit, stand, and walk later; have poorer cognitive function; perform worse in school; are more likely to repeat grades; miss more days of school due to illness; and are more likely to drop out of school than well-nourished children. Stunted children are at risk of completing 1.5 fewer years in school.^{2,3}
- In young children, anaemia can impair cognitive performance, behavioural and motor development, coordination, language development, and achievement in school.

Impact on Economic Development

- Malnutrition affects Malawi's economic productivity. Child deaths associated with undernutrition have already reduced Malawi's workforce by 10.7%.³
- In addition to lives and human capital lost, annual costs associated with child undernutrition are estimated at 147 billion MWK, equivalent to 10.3% of Malawi's gross domestic product.³

IQ Points Lost to Malnutrition⁵

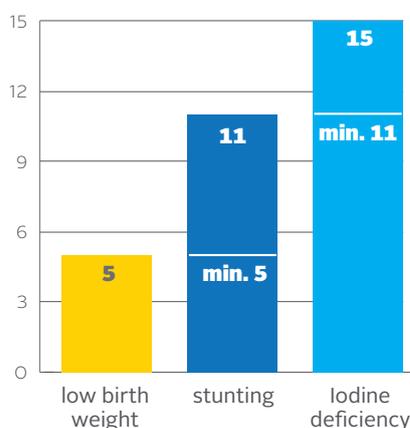


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Main data sources include: ¹ *Malawi Demographic and Health Survey 2011*, ² *Lancet Nutrition Series 2013*, ³ *The Cost of Hunger in Malawi*, ⁴ 'Iron Deficiency Anemia. Comparative Quantification of Health Risks: Global and Regional Burden of Diseases Attributable to Selected Major Risk Factors' (Stolzfus et al. 2004), and ⁵ 'Effects of Health and Nutrition on Cognitive and Behavioural Development in Children in the First Three Years of Life' (Grantham-McGregor et al. 1999) and 'Developmental Potential in the First 5 Years for Children in Developing Countries' (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007).

Malnutrition is *preventable and treatable*. But we must act now.

- Investing in proven, effective nutrition interventions implemented at scale will save and improve lives. By 2025, improved nutrition would:^{2,3}
 - Reduce child deaths by reducing stunting and wasting.
 - Prevent permanent brain damage in children and increase the average child's IQ up to 13.5 points by preventing iodine deficiency.
 - Improve cognitive development in children by preventing stunting and by preventing and treating iron-deficiency anaemia.
 - Result in children staying in school longer and performing better in school.
 - Result in increased physical capacity and fewer sick days in adulthood, leading to greater economic productivity.
 - Yield annual average savings of MWK 21,193.4 million (US\$85.9 million).

What can you do now?

- Commit resources to fully fund the National Nutrition Policy and Strategic Plan, which promotes proven, effective services to prevent and treat malnutrition.
- Continue to promote inter-ministerial coordination, commitment, and management of nutrition activities.
- Integrate nutrition, particularly efforts to reduce stunting, in all relevant sectoral strategies and plans, and ensure the swift adoption of policies for nutrition.
- Share and promote your commitment to good nutrition for mothers and children in Parliament and in your constituencies.



The Government of Malawi



How have we been successful in the past?

Under the leadership of the Office of the President and Cabinet, great achievements have been made in the area of nutrition over the past 10 years, including:

- Sound governance, policy guidance, and coordination for nutrition interventions across the line ministries of health, agriculture, education, gender, local government, and information.
- A historic and significant reduction in malnutrition, specifically stunting (short-for-age) which was reduced from 53% in 2004 to 42% in 2014. Vitamin A deficiency declined from 59% in 2003 to 22% in 2009.
- Increased global commitments on nutrition. As a result of high-level political commitment for nutrition, the Government has attracted a number of global commitments including the G8 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition with almost US\$500 million pledged from development partners and US\$180 million from the private sector to address food security and nutrition in Malawi for 2013-16.
- Recognition as an 'early riser' in the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in 2011.



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